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**Pesticide foes get federal attention |
Two EPA officials meet with Triangle Lake residents who
have been fighting spraying****BY SUSAN PALMER***The Register-Guard*Posted to Web: **Wednesday, Apr 21, 2010 12:07AM**Appeared in print: **Wednesday, Apr 21, 2010, page B3**

You could have knocked Day Owen over with a feather. The Triangle Lake resident who has been agitating against pesticide use on Coast Range forests for the past four years got word last month that a government official from Washington, D.C., was willing to meet and hear his concerns.

"I was stunned," Owen said. "Nobody that I've told about it can even believe that it's happening."

In fact, it happened Tuesday afternoon in a small meeting room at the Eugene Public Library.

Owen and nine of his neighbors met with Rick Keigwin, the director of the Environmental Protection Agency's pesticide re-evaluation division, and Scott Downey, manager of the EPA's regional pesticide toxics unit out of Seattle.

Owen, who founded the Pitchfork Rebellion in 2006 and is better known for rallies and protests, previously failed to get anyone at the EPA's Seattle office to even return his phone calls.

But Tuesday, he and the other residents had two hours to share their stories of being made sick by drifting pesticides applied by helicopters that are meant to suppress the weeds on clear-cut forestland. Herbicides, for example, are used to give Douglas fir saplings a head start in places where the steep slopes of Coast Range forests make it a challenge to apply the chemicals by hand.

Keigwin said he decided to meet with Owen because he already had a visit to Oregon planned and wanted to hear Owen's concerns about pesticide use. Owen said he believes he finally got an audience because of a new direction in EPA leadership under the Obama administration.

The meeting began well but ended on a testy note with Keigwin warning that government's wheels of change turn slowly, and Owen promising nonviolent civil disobedience if change doesn't come soon.

However, federal regulators and local residents agreed that the science of how pesticides drift isn't well understood in the distinctive mountains of the Coast Range.

"We've been struggling with drift for a number of years to get the science right," Keigwin said. "How these chemicals move when they're applied in hilly terrain is different than on a flat cornfield in Iowa."

The trouble, from Owen's point of view, is that the EPA's information on how pesticides drift comes from data provided by a task force made up of 42 pesticide and agricultural companies, such as Monsanto and Dow.

Keigwin was blunt about the reason for that: "They're the ones with the money," he said.

Owen and his neighbors are calling for a one-mile spray buffer around properties with homes or schools to protect people and the land, which includes a number of small organic farms. They want the EPA to conduct its own research on what constitutes a safe distance in their neck of the woods and to impose the one-mile buffer right away while that study is being conducted.

The EPA has formally accepted a Pitchfork Rebellion petition calling for the buffers and the EPA study on drift. It will be posted April 28 in the Federal Register, where people can comment on it, before the EPA considers its merits, Keigwin said.

Until 1995, Oregon had a 60-foot spray buffer around homes, but that was back when the state Department of Forestry oversaw pesticide enforcement. Then the state agency struck a deal with the state Department of Agriculture, agreeing to let the farm agency administer pesticide enforcement, and the 60-foot buffer rule was canceled.

Owen and his neighbors shared personal experiences — each had a story of health complications, ranging from racing heart and piercing headaches and backaches to long-term joint pain and disrupted menstrual cycles.

They also showed a video of helicopters that appeared to be spraying during windy or rainy conditions, which state law forbids. In some of the images, helicopters appeared to be spraying directly over streams, and state regulations require buffers for salmon-bearing waterways.

"Why do we give more protection for coho salmon and the spotted owl but none for children?" asked Justin Workman, who says his children have been suffering from poor health since a round of spraying occurred near his place in October.

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